

Some tips's about smartphones.

Q. What is a smartphone?

It's really a small tablet type computer that can also make ordinary mobile phone calls. I put off getting one for ages as I saw them as a 'yuppy' type toy. I'm now full converted to how good they are.

Q. What can I do with one?

Make phone calls, send and receive emails, browse the internet, play games, read ebooks, take photos and videos, watch videos and TV shows, use it to connect your computer to the internet, use it as a GPS just to name a few. They are a bit painful to type anything lengthy on due to the small screen size, however they are far easier to type on than the older style mobile phones.

Q. How much do they cost?

From under \$100 to about \$900. In simple terms, the more expensive phones are faster at doing things and have higher resolution screens. Mine is a budget Huawei brand G300 Ascend model that has been around for awhile. You can buy these on ebay for \$110 unlocked and delivered

Q. What sorts of smartphones are there? Which is best?

There are basically 3 'operating systems' Apples iPhone, Googles Android and Microsofts RT system. There is really no 'best' system, simply the most suitable system that suits your needs and budget. iPhones tend to be more expensive and lock you into the Apple way of doing things, however they are very highly regarded for ease of use (just ask any Apple owner). My Huawei uses an earlier version of the Google Android system (version 2.3)

Q. I already have a mobile phone. What do I do? Will I need a new phone number?

Its really simple, you just remove the SIM card from your old phone and put it in your new smartphone. You still keep the old number as it belongs to the SIM card. The important thing is to make sure that the new smartphone is 'unlocked', or is locked to the network you currently use. For example a Telstra SIM card will not work in a phone that is 'locked' to Optus or Vodaphone. 'Unlocked' means the phone will work with any of the SIM cards. You can get a 'locked' phone 'unlocked' but some telcos charge to do that.

Q. My old phone is on a monthly plan.

That's fine. The plan relates to the SIM card, not the phone that you put it in.

Q. My old phone is prepaid and I have some credit on it. Will I lose that credit?

No. The credit belongs to the SIM card, not the phone.

Q. How about all the contacts I have on my existing phone?

Contacts can be stored either in the phone itself, or on the SIM card. If they are stored in the phone, then before removing the SIM card, transfer all your stored phone numbers to the SIM card.

Q. Can I use the smartphone when I go overseas?

In most cases yes you can. The trick is to buy a new SIM card at whatever country you go to, remove you current SIM card and put in a safe place until you are back in Oz.

Some smartphones will let you have 2 SIM cards. These are called 'dual SIM' phones. You just select which SIM card to use when making a call.

Tip: Do NOT use global roaming unless you have plenty of money (in which case I want to discuss this further as I can help you in other ways.)

Q. How can I connect to the internet with a smartphone?

You can do it 2 ways.

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- One way is by connecting via your mobile phone connection. This will use up part of whatever monthly or prepaid plan you are on. To just check Google for something or see what emails you have isn't that expensive. Start emailing photos or downloading stuff and the expense will rise. On my Huawei phone I just enable a button called 'Data Switch', do my searching or checking and then disable it again.
- The other way is by connecting via WiFi to an existing ADSL modem. If you have an ADSL modem at home that has WiFi then connect via that. Once setup, the phone will automatically connect to whatever WiFi system(s) you are within range of. Some clubs and hotels provide WiFi for free, as does McDonalds and Officeworks just to name a couple.

Q. What's that bit about using your smartphone to connect your computer to the internet?

Yes you can. Most smartphones can act as what's called an 'access point'. This means the phone behaves just like one of those wireless broadband dongles. The smartphone does the connection to the internet. Your computer then connects to the smartphone via WiFi, or in some cases, by the charging cable. Naturally this is going to cost you as it will be using whatever data allowance you have on your plan or prepaid. Surprisingly, you can still make and receive phone calls whilst your smartphone is acting as an access point.

Q. What are 'Apps'?

'Apps' is short for 'Applications'. These are small programs that you install on your phone. There are thousands and thousands of Apps available and many are free, others are very low cost. Apps can be games, email, calendars, internet browsers, flashlights, bubble levels, banking, weather, music, you name it and there will be an App for it.

Q Where do I get 'Apps'? How hard are they to install?

For iPhones you get them online from the Apple App Store; for Android it's the Google Play Store. Installation is a no brainer as they install themselves automatically once you click 'Install'.

Q. How good are the photos taken by a smartphone?

In my humble opinion a dedicated camera does a far better job. However, even budget smartphones can take some very good photos provided there is good lighting. Some smartphones have both front and back cameras. Back facing cameras are good for 'selfies' and when making video calls using systems like Skype or Facebook.

Q. Can a smartphone play music? Or videos? Or radio stations?

Yes to all 3. For music or videos it's best to install a micro SD card (\$10 - \$20) in the phone for extra storage. You will also need earphones or headphones unless you are completely tone deaf and love annoying the crap out of nearby people. I have quite a bit of mp3 music on mine and love listening to it when on the train to Sydney. Many smartphones will also pick up FM radio stations but you definitely need earphones or headphones as they double as the antenna. Most smartphones come with earphones and a built in microphone.

Q. How easy are they for making phone calls?

Very easy. The screen makes it very easy to enter phone numbers and you can store favourites and recall them very easily. Mine synchronises with my gmail account so all my gmail contacts and their phone numbers, email addresses etc automatically appear on my phone. If I update details using either the phone or my computer then the changes automatically appear on the other one. But I'd better stop typing now before I get on my soapbox about the advantages of email accounts such as gmail / hotmail / yahoo mail.